

CAHABA RIVER
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

PUBLIC USE PLAN
COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATIONS
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION
STATEMENT
FONSI

October 2004

CAHABA RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

PUBLIC USE PLAN

October 2004

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION:

“To administer a national net-work of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

CAHABA RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE MISSION:

“To preserve, conserve, and restore biodiversity and biological integrity of the Cahaba River ecosystem while providing for compatible public uses.”

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) is located near the small town of West Blocton in Bibb County, Alabama (Fig. 1). The Refuge was authorized on October 19, 2000, when the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act (P.L. 106-331) was signed into law. The legislation directed the Secretary of Interior to acquire up to 3,500 acres of lands and waters within the boundaries of the Refuge.

On September 25, 2002 the Service established the Refuge and acquired initial Refuge lands. In partnership with the Nature Conservancy (TNC), the Service began acquiring land for the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge in September 2002. By September 2003, 2,977 acres had been acquired. In February 2004, the Regional Director (Southeast Region) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) authorized the expansion of the acquisition boundaries of the refuge to include an additional 340 acres of property at the confluence of the Cahaba and Little Cahaba Rivers. This expansion will allow us to better manage the refuge, further protect the Cahaba River, and also provide greater protection to several species of plants that are know from nowhere else in the world but this area. The remaining acreage will be acquired, from willing sellers, as funding is appropriated (Fig. 2).

CONFORMANCE WITH STATUTORY AUTHORITY

Scope and Rationale

The Refuge developed this Public Use Plan (Plan) to guide future public uses on the Refuge in a manner that allows us to fulfill the purpose for which the Refuge was established as well as to provide the public with compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities. The draft of this Plan was distributed for public comment on May 2, 2004 for a 30-day comment period to allow the public to comment on proposals presented within the Plan and to influence any future changes. This Plan is the instrument that guides future decisions on public use at the Refuge.

Legal Mandates

Guidance for authorizing public uses on National Wildlife Refuges is provided in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (the Act) of 1997. The Act states, “compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System . . . through which the American public can develop an appreciation for

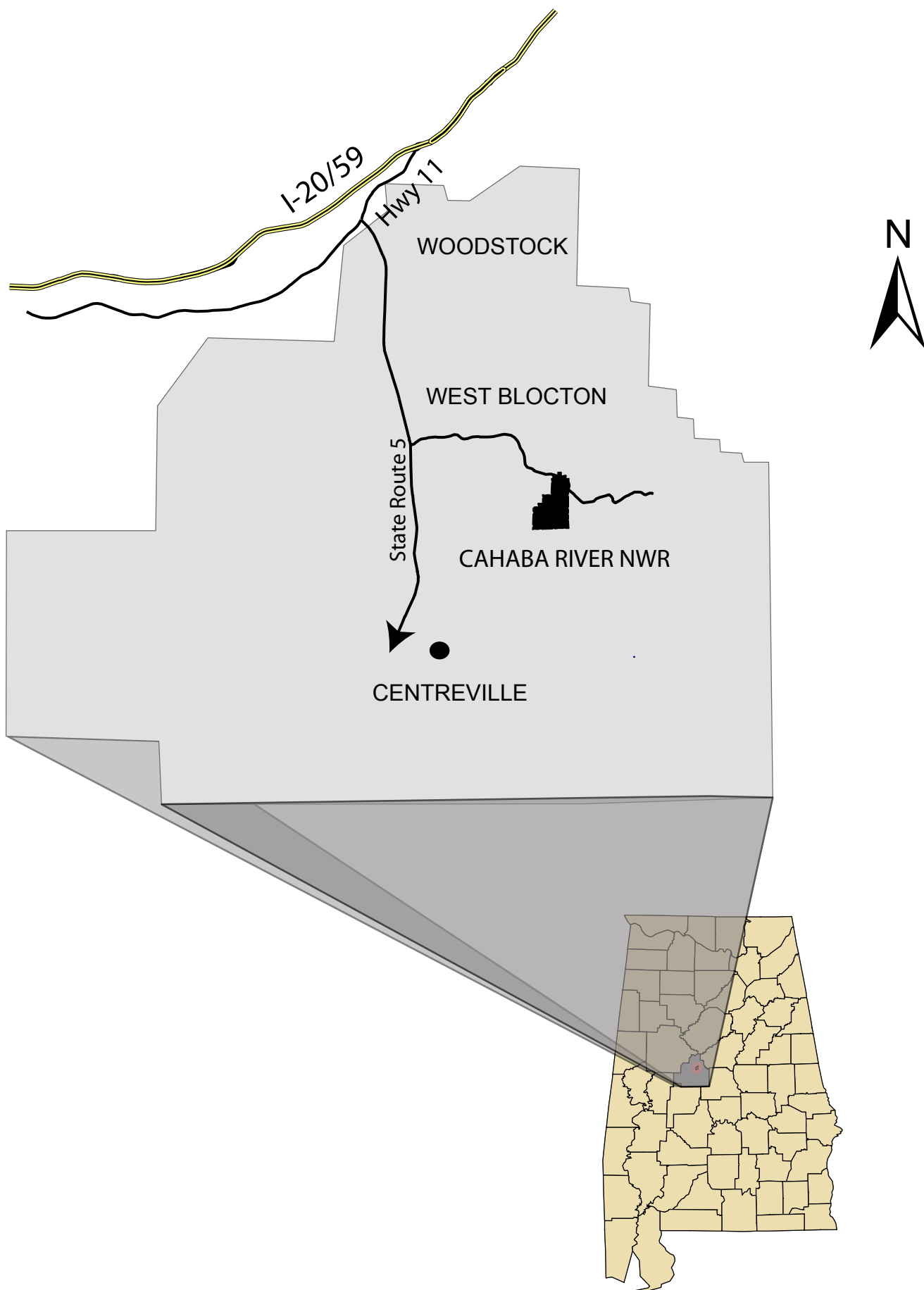


FIG. 1 CAHABA RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE LOCATION

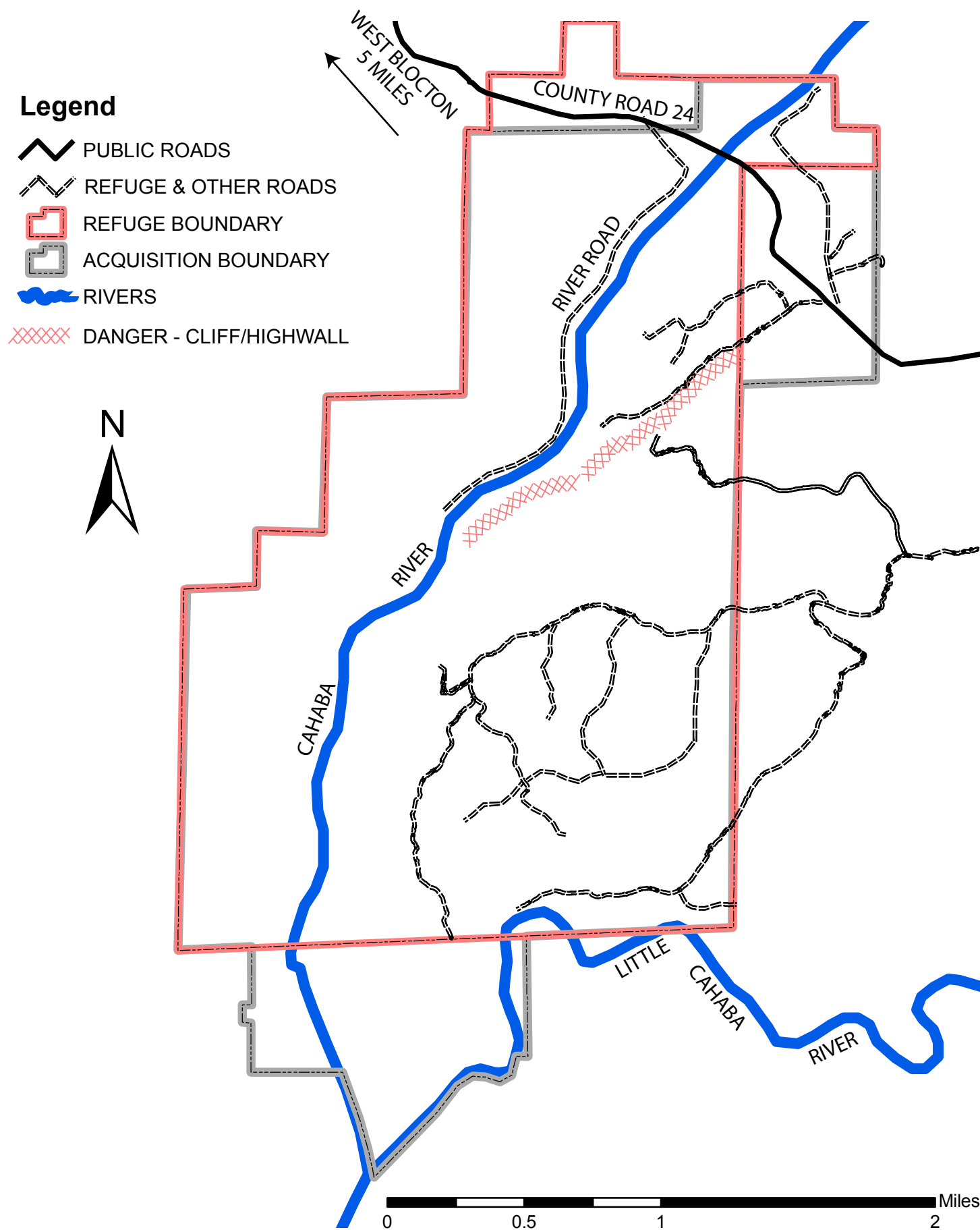


FIG. 2 CAHABA RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

fish and wildlife.” The Act recognizes that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education, and interpretation, when determined to be compatible, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of the Refuge System that should receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management. The term “compatible use” is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the refuge. Other uses not listed as priority public uses may be allowed if they are determined to be appropriate and compatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established.

According to the Act, when a wildlife-dependent recreational use is determined to be a compatible use and is not inconsistent with public safety, that activity should be facilitated. The Service’s Final Compatibility Policy Pursuant to the Act delegates the responsibility of determining compatibility to the Refuge Manager with concurrence by the Regional Chief. Because the Refuge is currently unstaffed and unfunded, support for these compatible uses will be limited. The Refuge will seek volunteers and partners to facilitate these compatible uses.

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act (P.L. 106-331), directed the Secretary of Interior to acquire up to 3,500 acres of lands and waters within the boundaries of the refuge. The purpose of the Refuge as designated in the establishment legislation is to;

- (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species);
- (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.);
- (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3); and
- (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources.

Relationship to Other Plans

The Refuge conducted an Environmental Assessment of the uses proposed within this document including alternatives to the proposed action. The Final Environmental Assessment is included as an attachment to this Plan.

The Refuge is developing a Hunting Plan that will outline the Refuge's proposed hunting program in greater detail than provided within this Public Use Plan. The Hunting Plan will provide more complete guidance as to the activities, timing, and location of any hunting on the Refuge. The Hunting Plan will incorporate all comments received regarding hunting activities within this Public Use Plan, Environmental Assessment, and the Compatibility Determination for Hunting. Once completed, copies of the final Hunting Plan will be available upon request. Refuge-specific regulations and other details of the Hunting Plan will appear in the Federal Register prior to implementation in order to solicit further public comments.

The Refuge completed compatibility determinations on uses proposed within this document. The Compatibility Determinations are included as an attachment to this Plan for public review. All uses proposed within this Plan are deemed compatible with the mission of the Refuge. These uses, which include hunting, wildlife viewing, photography, interpretation, and environmental education, will be presented in this Plan to solicit public comments. A list and description of the public uses proposed for the Refuge is provided in this document. A list and brief description of those public uses determined to not be compatible on the Refuge are also provided for further public comment. Compatibility determinations must be prepared for all public uses proposed on a refuge. Any additional public uses identified during the public review of this document or any uses identified in the future will need compatibility determinations prior to any further action being taken.

The Public Use Plan and the future Hunting Plan are considered "step-down" management plans of the required Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). All refuges are required to develop a CCP that will; (1) describe the desired future conditions of a refuge and provide long-range guidance and management direction to achieve refuge purposes; (2) help fulfill the National Wildlife Refuge System mission; (3) maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System; and (4) help meet other mandates. This Plan and the Hunting Plan will be incorporated and amended as necessary as the Refuge develops its CCP by 2017.

REFUGE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Legislation authorizing the Refuge outlined four purposes for its establishment. These purposes formed the foundation for the following four goals.

1. Conserve, enhance, and restore native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River
2. Conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed as threatened or endangered
3. Facilitate hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation as priority general public uses of the refuge when compatible
4. Encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-federal entities when promoting awareness of the refuge's resources and those of the National Wildlife Refuge System

During development of our CCP, we will seek to further define these goals and develop new goals to better guide our activities on the Refuge.

The Refuge is in the process of developing objectives in support of these goals. Objectives that may affect public use include:

1. Improve public access to the Cahaba River
2. Reduce point sources of sediment run-off into the Cahaba River from River Road and other identifiable sources within the Refuge boundaries
3. Restore bottomland and upland forest communities along the Refuge's River Road
4. Reclaim and restore portions of the Refuge impacted by previous coal mining activities
5. Educate the public about littering and protection of their natural heritage
6. Manage and, where appropriate, restore longleaf pine habitats
7. Develop a system of trails and interpretive signs that will allow the public to understand the importance of protecting the Cahaba River Watershed
8. Increase public access to areas east of the Cahaba River

ASSESSMENT

No uses will be allowed that are determined to not be compatible with purposes for which the refuge was established or the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The attached compatibility determinations seek to ensure that uses as proposed within this Plan are appropriate and compatible.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PUBLIC USE PROGRAM

Most Refuge management activities (restoration, public use, monitoring, and research) will provide an opportunity for public participation and to teach/encourage environmental stewardship. Programs and activities will be developed to enable our visitors:

- Awareness and ecological understanding of the Refuge and adjacent landscape.
- Knowledge of how humans affect the natural system.
- Understanding the value of Cahaba River ecosystem for fish and wildlife.
- Recognition of wildlife values in general.

Due to the ongoing acquisition process, a large portion of the Refuge may not be readily accessible because of access limitations. If any parcels of Refuge land are closed, the Service will notify the public and clearly mark any closed areas.

Compatible Public Use

The term “compatible use” is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the Director, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the System or the purposes of the refuge. The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is “to administer a national net-work of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

The Service has responsibility for the protection and management of fish, wildlife and the habitats upon which they depend. Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge is a special place where the Service will maintain and enhance the Cahaba River ecosystem for fish and wildlife. The Cahaba River is Alabama’s longest free-flowing river and supports 64 rare and imperiled plant and animal species found nowhere else in the world. In fulfilling our resource responsibilities, however, we will also provide the public with opportunities to enjoy and learn about wildlife and opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation so long as they do not materially interfere with our habitat and wildlife conservation activities and do not pose a hazard to the public’s safety.

This section describes uses that we determined to be compatible with the goals of the Refuge and provides guidelines and plans for facilities and activities (see attached Compatibility Determinations). Specific locations of facilities, except in a few instances, are not yet known. As funding becomes available, facilities will be developed to aid in the management of the Refuge, including the support of public use.

Priority Wildlife-Dependent Public Uses

The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 (PL 105-57) states that there are 6 wildlife dependent public uses that, when determined to be compatible, are to be the priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. These uses are hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education and interpretation. Since these 6 uses are the priority public uses of the Refuge System they will be considered first, prior to other uses that may be wildlife dependent.

Wildlife Observation and Photography

Wildlife observation generally requires few facilities. Safe access, effective observation points, and a minimum number of directional signs should be sufficient. There is an element of pleasure in discovering the environment on one's own; too many signs and labels can detract from a natural experience. Unless closed for public safety or wildlife conservation reasons, Refuge lands will be open to wildlife observation.

Interpretive programming and special event planning will be designed to help visitors develop their observation skills. This could include bird watching classes, raptor identification, and native plant identification. These programs will be designed to also demonstrate responsible actions toward our natural resources and other users. Currently the Refuge is unstaffed, so staff-led interpretive programs will be limited and the Refuge will depend on volunteers and partners to accomplish these tasks.

Wildlife photography will be allowed within designated public use areas of the refuge. The Service may issue special use permits to individuals who wish to set up temporary blinds for wildlife photography or to individuals who are professional photographers and wish to use photos taken on the Refuge for commercial purposes. Permit conditions will minimize wildlife and habitat disturbance that might result from this activity and may allow use of professional photographs taken on the Refuge for Refuge exhibits.

Hunting

Hunting provides the public with wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities. Refuge policies and programs will be developed to provide visitors with a high-quality hunting experience. Following the final publication of the Refuge's Public Use Plan, we will draft a Hunting Plan in consultation with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. Recreation and environmental education will be combined with hunter skills education programs designed to assist the hunting public in the development of safe and effective hunting skills and environmental stewardship value. Hunters will be required to follow all Federal, State, and Refuge-specific regulations.

Ground or elevated blinds may be used if they do not damage live vegetation and are completely removed from the property each day at the close of the hunting hours. Ground blinds may not be constructed from Refuge vegetation.

Fishing

Fishing has long been a favorite past time for users of the Cahaba River. The Refuge will facilitate the continued use of the Cahaba River for this priority public use. The Refuge represents the only public access to the Cahaba River for approximately 30 river miles. Improvements to the access road and bank fishing sites will be needed to protect the river from continued sedimentation. With the help of anglers, we believe that fishing will continue to be an important recreational use of the Refuge.

Environmental Education and Interpretation

Refuge management, restoration, public use, monitoring, and research will be viewed as potential opportunities to provide public participation and teach/encourage environmental stewardship. Environmental education and interpretation play a critical role in encouraging environmental stewardship. The future of fish and wildlife is best assured by raising the public's awareness and understanding of wildlife conservation.

It can also be a place where visitors can experience for themselves the connection between people and wildlife, habitat, and land management. The Refuge can be a place where people learn basic outdoor skills or see first-hand how they can restore and sustain wildlife habitat on their own land. Education and interpretation programs, therefore, must encompass a broad range of needs and outcomes. To move toward fulfilling this broad range of needs, the Service will seek partners and volunteers to aid the unstaffed refuge to fulfill this critical function.

Other Non-priority Uses

Canoeing

Canoeing is an excellent way to observe wildlife with little disturbance. Canoeing is also a favorite outdoor recreation activity on the Cahaba River during certain times of the year. The Refuge will continue to provide non-commercial access to the river for persons wishing to use the Refuge as a put-in or take-out site. A special-use permit would be utilized for any person or group that uses Refuge facilities for Cahaba River access if a fee is charged for the rental or guiding of visitors in canoes. These commercial activities would only be allowed if first determined to be compatible.

Bicycling

Bicycling has been determined to be compatible if conducted on roads open to vehicle traffic. Bicycling on the refuge is considered a means of transportation to access sites available to other vehicles. Mountain biking on trails within the refuge, off of established vehicular roads, is prohibited.

The Refuge's first priority is protection of the Cahaba River. Sedimentation from erosion on trails would negatively impact the river. Restoration of existing trails to prevent further erosion and impacts to the river will be conducted over time as funding permits.

Activities Determined to Not be Compatible Uses

The following activities have been determined to not be compatible with the purpose for which the refuge was established, or the Refuge lacks sufficient resources to make these activities compatible. These determinations are documented in the Compatibility Determinations included as an attachment to this document. Any additional activities not listed within this document are considered to not be compatible until evaluated in a Compatibility Determination.

Off-Road Vehicle Use

Evidence of ATV and other off-road vehicle use are present within the Refuge boundaries. Due to the high erosion potential, proximity to the Cahaba River, and for other reasons outlined in the Off-Road Vehicle Compatibility Determination, this use will no longer be allowed. We will seek enforcement action to curtail this use whenever we discover it occurring.

Horseback Riding

Horseback riding will not be allowed on the Refuge during this plan period. Access to refuge lands is currently possible only via the River Road. Due to concerns with erosion, parking associated with horseback riding, and other factors as outlined in the Horseback Riding Compatibility Determination, we are unable to accommodate this use at the present time.

Camping

Camping has occurred along the shores of the Cahaba River within the Refuge boundaries. This is an activity that has persisted following acquisition of the area by the Service in 2002. Camping has negatively impacted many sites along the riverbank, leading to loss of vegetation and erosion. No facilities are currently available on the refuge for human waste, further impacting the Cahaba River. Given our mission to preserve and protect the river, and due to other factors as outlined in the Camping

Compatibility Determination, it is not possible to continue to allow camping under the present conditions.

MEASURES TAKEN TO AVOID CONFLICTS WITH OTHER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

People visiting the Refuge will expect:

- Easily understood signs, directions, and rules
- Wildlife in natural settings
- Safety and good access

A clear system of welcome and orientation signs will allow visitors to know where to go; what recreation, interpretation and education opportunities are available; any limits on uses; and how to make the best use of their time while visiting the Refuge.

Visitor orientation will be provided directly on the Refuge through the use of signs, brochures, flyers, maps, and trail guides to direct visitors. Outlets off the Refuge that would be a source of information may include local media, sporting goods stores, chamber of commerce offices, tourism offices, and the Internet.

The boundary of all lands owned by the Service will be marked with Refuge boundary signs.

HOW PUBLIC USE WILL BE CONDUCTED

Safety

The only vehicle access to the refuge is along River Road, a single track road that supports two-way traffic along a portion of its length. River Road is within the floodplain of the Cahaba River. Users should not attempt to utilize the road during periods of high water.

River Road will remain open pending development of alternate routes to access the lower reaches of the Cahaba River within the Refuge boundary. If it is determined that user safety is compromised, the Refuge may periodically close River Road to traffic.

Entry Access/Procedures

Public entry into the Refuge is limited due to ongoing acquisitions. The River Road, off of Bibb County Road 24, represents the only available route for the public to access the

refuge from a public road. As additional properties are acquired, the Refuge will attempt to provide vehicular access to more areas.

The River Road has severe limitations as a public access route. The single-track road accommodates two-way traffic along only a portion of its length. Many stretches of the River Road allow one-way traffic only and pullouts, for vehicles to meet and pass, are limited. River Road is within the floodplain of the Cahaba River and may be closed due to high water during frequent periods of high rainfall. Visitors should curtail their use of River Road during high rain events. Once an alternate route is available for users to access the lower reaches of the Cahaba River, portions of the River Road may be closed to vehicle traffic.

The Refuge considered limiting access to daylight hours only within the Environmental Assessment (attached). Several law enforcement problems are evident along River Road including littering, graffiti, and evidence of illegal drug use. The Refuge plans to explore greater law enforcement for the small number of illegal users prior to limiting access to all persons. This alternative was not selected but may be enacted without further public review if law enforcement to control the small number of illegal users persist.

Law Enforcement

Enforcement of Refuge trespass and other public use violations normally associated with management of a National Wildlife Refuge, will be the responsibility of commissioned Refuge Law Enforcement Officers working cooperatively with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and other law enforcement agencies. General trespass, poaching, and other violations will be cooperatively enforced by these agencies. Procedures for obtaining law enforcement assistance will be based on legal jurisdiction where the incident occurs. The Refuge is currently unstaffed and unfunded and will utilize law enforcement personnel from Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge as necessary to meet law enforcement demands. The Service will meet with local law enforcement agencies and develop coordinated law enforcement strategies.

Community Involvement

The success of the Refuge will not only be measured by the ecological restoration and enhancement of the Cahaba River ecosystem, but also by our effectiveness in working with other agencies and individuals to preserve and enhance the biodiversity of Alabama. We hope that the local communities come to view the Refuge as a positive economic benefit and as a good neighbor.

Many public use activities will be done cooperatively with partners and with the use of volunteers. Activities such as outdoor skills education programs, bird watching clinics, and other special events are examples of public use activities that can be accomplished through cooperative partnerships.

Many refuges across the country have the privilege of working cooperatively with a non-profit community support group, which can support the Refuge through volunteer hours, outreach, advocacy, and funding. The Service welcomes the opportunity to continue to work with partners and other groups. Whether or not partnerships are formalized, the Service and its partners will continue to work under the principles of trust, respect, and open communications.

The public has skills and interests that complement those within the Service. By assisting Refuge staff to restore and reconstruct natural communities, people can develop new skills and stewardship ethics through positive environmental action. By participating, the public can enjoy the overall success of the project and contribute to the larger good.

Support

The Refuge is committed to supporting priority wildlife dependent public uses and other compatible wildlife-dependent public uses. Lack of staffing and funding for the Refuge limits our ability to fully facilitate these activities with staff-led and -organized activities. The Refuge will rely on volunteers and cooperative agreements with other agencies and organizations to facilitate these compatible uses. As staffing and funding is established, the Refuge will be better able to oversee and facilitate these uses with the help of our existing partners.

CAHABA RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATIONS

for

FISHING

**ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND
INTERPRETATION**

BICYCLING

HORSEBACK RIDING

BIG GAME AND UPLAND GAME HUNTING

WILDLIFE OBSERVATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

CANOEING

CAMPING

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Compatibility Determination

Use: FISHING

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant

resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Fishing is 1 of 6 wildlife-dependent, priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since Cahaba River NWR is a relatively new refuge, the exact number of users is unknown. Lands within the Refuge have been used by anglers to access the Cahaba River for several years prior to Refuge establishment. This use has continued after establishment pending a compatibility determination. Local interest in these activities is high and initial estimates are 6,000 users annually. This priority public use will be expanded as resources and demand permit.

Where would the use be conducted?

Fishing could occur anywhere along the Cahaba River within the current Refuge boundary. As additional areas are acquired they will be evaluated to determine their suitability for this activity.

Access to many areas is limited due to ongoing acquisition. Access to the Cahaba River currently is limited to River Road. The road is a single track lane that supports 2-way traffic along a portion of its length. Several segments of the road support only 1-way traffic with pull-outs for passing. Upgrades or an alternate route to access the lower reaches of the Cahaba River will be necessary in the future. As we complete refuge acquisition, additional access may be provided.

When would the use be conducted?

Fishing would be allowed during posted Refuge hours.

How would the use be conducted?

Fishing would be subject to federal, state and refuge-specific regulations on the Cahaba River. Camping and use of ATV's would not be allowed.

Why is this use being proposed?

Fishing is 1 of the 6 priority wildlife dependent public uses. The Refuge is the only public access point for fishing for approximately 30 river miles.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$5,000 of staff time, \$40,000 of initial start-up costs and \$9,000 of other operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

The River Road leading to the Cahaba River on the Refuge needs several improvements.

1. The launch and fishing area needs to be paved or other hard surface installed to provide parking and launching areas and to prevent sedimentation into the river from ongoing erosion.
2. The intersection with County Road 24 needs to be redesigned to eliminate the steep incline and poor visibility.
3. River Road is too narrow for 2-way traffic through most of its length. An alternate route needs to be developed that would allow users to reach the lower reaches of the Cahaba River.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Monitoring or Guiding of Activities - \$2,500

Trash Removal - \$500

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$2,000

Maintenance Costs

Signs - \$250

Grading - \$1,500

Gravel - \$7,500

Access Ramp - \$40,000

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to Fishing is estimated at \$300 initially and \$100 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues:

None

What efforts have been made to secure adequate resources to support this priority public use?

The Refuge is currently unstaffed and unfunded. Funding for specific needs and projects are currently being sought through the NWRS Refuge Operations and Needs System (RONS) and Maintenance Management System (MMS) programs. In FY 2004, funding for the Central Alabama National Wildlife Refuge Complex Project Leader position was funded through the Cahaba River NWR RONS project. This position is located at Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in Anniston, Alabama.

Some funding has been provided by the Bibb County Commission in support of the Refuge, and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants as an interim funding measure to support public use projects. A federal matching grant was obtained by the refuge in 2004 to facilitate improvements to the Cahaba River access point on the River Road using Bibb County Commission funds as a match. Additional funding to support habitat restoration and studies has been pledged by The Nature Conservancy of Alabama and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants to fund restoration activities.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are all minor and include damage to vegetation, littering, increased refuge maintenance, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts to wildlife or habitats are anticipated.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No public comments were received directly related to this use during the comment period.

NEPA Compliance:

What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge,
October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7
Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Fishing (general)

Use is compatible with the following
stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety. Activity may occur during Refuge hours only. Overnight camping and ATV's will not be allowed.

Justification:

Allowing fishing on the Refuge would be consistent with established Refuge goals.

Fishing is 1 of the 6 wildlife-dependent public uses that are to be supported within units of the National Wildlife Refuge System when compatible.

This use is not expected to conflict with any proposed habitat management or reclamation projects on the Refuge provided the Refuge utilizes closures as necessary to protect public safety and to allow habitat management actions such as prescribed burning on the refuge.

Signature:

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2019

Compatibility Determination

Use: ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

“The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Environmental Education and Interpretation are 2 of the 6 legislated wildlife-dependent, priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since Cahaba River NWR is a relatively new refuge, the exact number of users is unknown. Local interest in these activities is growing and initial estimates are 2,000 users annually. This priority public use will be expanded as resources and demand permit.

No Environmental Education and Interpretation opportunities have been developed since establishment of the Refuge on September 25, 2002.

Where would the use be conducted?

Environmental Education and Interpretation could occur throughout the refuge area acquired to date. As additional areas are acquired they will be evaluated to determine their suitability for this activity.

Access to many areas is limited due to ongoing acquisition. Currently, only River Road connects the Refuge directly to a public road. All other areas of the Refuge are accessed via gated private roads. Due to ongoing problems with dumping, littering, and graffiti in the area it is unlikely that these gated private roads will be opened for public use in the near future. As we complete refuge acquisition, additional access may be provided.

When would the use be conducted?

Environmental Education and Interpretation would occur year-round during posted Refuge hours.

How would the use be conducted?

Environmental Education and Interpretation would be subject to any applicable federal, state, and refuge-specific regulations and occur within designated public use areas on the Refuge.

Why is this use being proposed?

Environmental Education and Interpretation are proposed to offer the public educational opportunities that are identified as the priority wildlife dependent public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$5,000 of staff time and \$9,000 of overhead will be needed to administer this use.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

Interpretive signs must be developed and installed to support these uses.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Monitoring or Guiding of Activities - \$2,500

Trash Removal - \$500

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$2,500

Maintenance Costs

Road/Trail Repair/Grading - \$2,000

Gravel - \$4,000

Signs - \$3,000

Mowing - \$250

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to Environmental Education and Interpretation is estimated at \$300 initially and \$100 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues:

None

What efforts have been made to secure adequate resources to support this priority public use?

The Refuge is currently unstaffed and unfunded. Funding for specific needs and projects are currently being sought through the NWRs Refuge Operations and Needs System (RONS) and Maintenance Management System (MMS) programs. In FY 2004, funding for the Central Alabama National Wildlife Refuge Complex Project Leader position was funded through the Cahaba River NWR RONS project. This position is located at Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in Anniston, Alabama.

Some funding has been provided by the Bibb County Commission in support of the Refuge, and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants as an interim funding measure to support public use projects. A federal matching grant was obtained by the refuge in 2004 to facilitate improvements to the Cahaba River access point on the River Road using Bibb County Commission funds as a match.

Additional funding to support habitat restoration and studies has been pledged by The Nature Conservancy of Alabama and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants to fund restoration activities. In 2004, funds were obtained using TNC matching funds that will allow restoration of approximately 900 acres of longleaf pine on previously clearcut sites.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are all minor and include damage to vegetation, littering, increased refuge maintenance, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts to wildlife or habitats are anticipated.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No public comments were received directly related to this use on Cahaba River NWR during the public comment period.

A written comment was received on this use following the public meeting held in West Blocton on March 18, 2004. The commenter requested that we develop an environmental education program for county school students.

Our response was:

This is an excellent idea that will be explored through volunteer efforts or once staffing and funding are sufficient to allow it to occur.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

NEPA Compliance:

What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge,
October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7
Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Environmental education (teaching
students)

Use is compatible with the following
stipulations.

Environmental education (other)

Use is compatible with the following
stipulations.

Environmental education (teaching
teachers or group leaders)

Use is compatible with the following
stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety. These uses may occur during Refuge hours only.

Justification:

Allowing environmental education and interpretation on the Refuge would be consistent with established Refuge goals.

Environmental education and interpretation are 2 of the 6 wildlife-dependent public uses that are to be supported within units of the National Wildlife Refuge System when compatible.

These uses are not expected to conflict with any proposed habitat management or reclamation projects provided the Refuge utilizes closures as necessary to protect public safety and to allow habitat management actions such as prescribed burning.

Signature:

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2019

Compatibility Determination

Use: BICYCLING

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant

resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Riding bicycles for transportation, pleasure or exercise is not 1 of the 6 priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Bicycling is being proposed in support of priority public uses.

Where would the use be conducted?

As proposed, bicycling would be allowed only for transportation only on those roads open for vehicle traffic.

Access to many areas is limited due to ongoing acquisition. Currently, only one River Road connects the Refuge directly to a public road. All other areas of the Refuge are accessed via gated private roads. Due to ongoing problems with dumping, littering, and graffiti in the area it is unlikely that these gated private roads will be opened for public access. As we complete refuge acquisition, additional access may be provided.

When would the use be conducted?

Bicycling could occur year round during refuge hours. Bicycling is more likely to occur from April to October, due to weather conditions.

How would the use be conducted?

It is anticipated that bicycle riding would be self-guided utilizing refuge maps, brochures and kiosks.

Why is this use being proposed?

Bicycling is an environmentally sound transportation method that would allow users to visit the refuge without noise or air pollution associated with motor vehicles.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$1,000 of staff time and \$6,000 of operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use provided bicycling is confined to roads that allow vehicular traffic.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

Traffic on Refuge roads is expected to be limited to refuge users only, a bicycle or pedestrian lane should not be required.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Monitoring or Guiding of Activities - \$500

Trash Pick-up - \$250

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$750

Maintenance Costs

Road/Trail Repair/Grading - \$1,000

Gravel - \$3,000

Signs - \$500

Mowing - \$1,000

Bicycle Racks - \$500

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to bicycling is estimated at \$200 initially and \$100 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues:

None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are all minor and include damage to vegetation, littering, increased refuge maintenance response, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts are expected on wildlife or habitat.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated with this use as proposed.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No public comments were received directly related to this use on Cahaba River NWR during the public comment period.

A written comment was received on this use following the public meeting held in West Blocton on March 18, 2004. The commenter requested that we develop a multi-use trail system that would support bicycling as well as horseback riding.

Our response was:

Bicycling (and horseback riding) is not a priority public use on a National Wildlife Refuge. We will first utilize our limited available resources to support those activities which are priority public uses.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

NEPA Compliance:

What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Bicycling

Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Bicycling would be confined to roads open to vehicular traffic. Bicycles and bicycling would be prohibited on all firebreaks, trails, and roads not open for vehicular traffic.

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, reclamation, or to protect public safety. The activity may occur during Refuge hours only.

Justification:

As proposed, bicycling would enable refuge users to travel on roads open for vehicular traffic. Bicycling would support legislated wildlife-dependent public uses.

Signature:

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2014

Compatibility Determination

Use: HORSEBACK RIDING

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant

resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Horseback riding for pleasure is not 1 of the 6 priority public wildlife dependent uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Where would the use be conducted?

Refuge roads, firebreaks and trails.

When would the use be conducted?

Horseback riding could occur year round during refuge hours. Horseback riding is more likely to occur from April to October due to weather conditions.

How would the use be conducted?

It is anticipated that Horseback riding would be self-guided utilizing refuge-provided maps, brochures, and kiosks.

Why is this use being proposed?

Horseback riders have contacted the refuge concerning the possibility of utilizing the area.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$5,000 of staff time, \$75,000 of initial start-up funding and \$27,500 of annual maintenance funds would be needed to support this use.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Central Alabama Refuge Complex Project Leader stationed at Mountain Longleaf NWR is the only staff person and is not located on site.

The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but would use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR

maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

Special parking area would be needed to allow parking of trucks and horse trailers.

Trails would need to be developed that avoid steep slopes and impacts to the river.

Additional access routes into the Refuge would need to be provided.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$5,000

Maintenance Costs

Gravel - \$10,000

Signs - \$1,000

Mowing - \$1,000

Parking Areas - \$5,000

Trash Removal - \$500

Monitoring costs:

If horseback riding occurs on any roads, trails or firebreaks on the refuge it would be necessary to implement an extensive monitoring system for the areas open for this use. Due to the steep terrain that refuge roads/trails/firebreaks traverse and the soil types found on the refuge, extensive erosion is probable. Monitoring costs would be approximately \$5,000 annually.

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to horseback riding is estimated at \$300 initially and \$100 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues:

None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are damage to vegetation due to trampling and browsing, erosion, littering, increased refuge maintenance response to activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

Long-term impacts to wildlife are expected to include loss of habitat due to erosion and infrastructure improvements and possible loss of habitat due to exotic species introduction. The increase in maintenance required to support this use would detract from normal maintenance and maintenance conducted in support of legislated wildlife dependent priority public uses.

Cumulative:

Each use added in addition to priority public uses will result in an increase in traffic and needed infrastructure. Horseback riding will lead to cumulative impacts to habitat, maintenance costs and infrastructure needs.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new

to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No comments were received during the public comment period regarding Horseback Riding.

A written comment was received on this use following the public meeting held in West Blocton on March 18, 2004. The commenter requested that we develop multiple use trails where horseback riding could be combined with other uses such as mountain biking to enjoy the refuge.

Our response was:

Horseback riding is not a priority public use on a National Wildlife Refuge. We will first utilize our limited available resources to support those activities which are priority public uses.

The only public access road on the refuge is too small to support the use and insufficient parking exists to accommodate the use.

We will reevaluate this use once sufficient staffing and funding is in place to support additional uses.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

NEPA Compliance:

What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge,
October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7
Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Horseback Riding	Use is not compatible.
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Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Not Applicable

Justification:

Horseback riding would lead to the direct loss of habitat due to infrastructure improvements, erosion, and trampling.

Horseback riding would necessitate additional parking, infrastructure, and maintenance beyond what the refuge's current budget can support or staff oversee.

Signature:

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2014

Compatibility Determination

Use: BIG GAME AND UPLAND GAME HUNTING

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant

resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge was established on September 25, 2002. Hunting occurred on this private property prior to refuge establishment via hunting leases and other private agreements. Hunting has not been authorized to occur on the Refuge since establishment.

Hunting is 1 of the 6 legislated wildlife-dependent, priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Hunting would occur within designated hunting areas on the Refuge during Refuge hunting seasons that are within Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources established hunting seasons. Meetings would be held annually with Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources staff to set these dates. Hunting would be subject to Federal, State and Refuge-specific regulations.

Since Cahaba River NWR is a new refuge, the exact number of users is unknown. Based on hunting that occurs on the adjacent Cahaba River Wildlife Management Area, we would anticipate up to 75 people and 40 vehicles to utilize the public hunting area each day of the weekend during the peak of seasons for white-tailed deer and wild turkey. We expect approximately 25 people and 15 vehicles on a weekday during the peak of the white-tailed deer and wild turkey season. We anticipate up to 500 additional user-days per year for all other species hunted.

Where would the use be conducted?

Hunting could occur throughout the refuge area acquired to date. As additional areas are acquired they will be evaluated to determine their suitability for this activity.

Access to many areas is limited due to ongoing acquisition. Currently, only one Refuge road connects directly to a public road. All other areas of the Refuge are accessed via gated private roads. Due to ongoing problems with dumping, littering, and graffiti in the area it is unlikely that these gated private roads will be opened for public access. The current lack of access would necessitate hiking to many hunting areas on the Refuge. As we complete Refuge acquisition, additional access could be provided.

When would the use be conducted?

Hunting would occur during designated Refuge hunting seasons that are within Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources established hunting seasons. Meetings would be held annually with Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources staff to set these dates.

How would the use be conducted?

Hunting would be subject to Federal, State and Refuge-specific regulations and occur within designated hunting areas on the Refuge. Camping and use of ATV's would not be allowed. Tree stands or blinds would be removed daily by the hunter.

Why is this use being proposed?

Hunting is proposed to offer the public recreation opportunities that are identified as the priority wildlife dependent public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$9,000 of staff time and \$20,000 of other operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Hunt Coordination Meetings and Data Analysis - \$2,000

Monitoring of Hunting Activities - \$3,000

Trash Pick-up - \$500

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$3,500

Maintenance Costs

Road Repair/Grading - \$5,000

Gravel - \$10,000

Signs - \$1,000

Trash Removal - \$1,000

Mowing - \$3,000

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge would utilize a self-reporting system to monitor use and harvests. Monitoring costs would be minimized for the Refuge under this scenario and are expected to be \$1,000.00 annually.

Offsetting revenues:

None

What efforts have been made to secure adequate resources to support this priority public use?

The Refuge is currently unstaffed and unfunded. Funding for specific needs and projects are currently being sought through the NWRS Refuge Operations and Needs System (RONS) and Maintenance Management System (MMS) programs. In FY 2004, funding for the Central Alabama National Wildlife Refuge Complex Project Leader position was funded through the Cahaba River NWR RONS project. This position is located at Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in Anniston, Alabama.

Some funding has been provided by the Bibb County Commission in support of the Refuge, and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants as an interim funding measure to support public use projects. A federal matching grant was obtained by the Refuge in 2004 to facilitate improvements to the Cahaba River access point on the River Road using Bibb County Commission funds as a match.

Additional funding to support habitat restoration and studies has been pledged by The Nature Conservancy of Alabama and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants to fund restoration activities. In 2004, funds were obtained using TNC matching funds that will allow restoration of approximately 900 acres of longleaf pine on previously clearcut sites.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are all minor and include damage to vegetation, littering, increased refuge maintenance response to activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts to wildlife or habitats are anticipated with the use as proposed.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the Refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No comments were received during the comment period regarding Hunting.

Three written comments were received on this use following the public meeting held in West Blocton on March 18, 2004. The commenters requested that we coordinate our hunting efforts with the adjacent Cahaba River Wildlife Management Area.

One additional written comment was received in February during our scoping period for this document from a State partner requesting that we coordinate our hunting efforts with the adjacent Cahaba River WMA.

Our response was:

We plan to coordinate the Refuge hunting program with the adjacent Cahaba Wildlife Management Area. We will draft our Hunting Plan in cooperation with the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

NEPA Compliance:

What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge,
October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7
Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Hunting (big game)	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.
Hunting (upland game)	Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety. Activity may occur during Refuge hours only. Overnight camping and ATV's will not be allowed.

Deer hunting will be limited to archery-only to limit the number of hunters utilizing the area. Hunting will be limited to those species authorized to be hunted on the Refuge as listed in the Federal Register.

Justification:

Allowing hunting on the Refuge would be consistent with established Refuge goals.

Hunting is 1 of the 6 wildlife-dependent public uses that are to be supported within units of the National Wildlife Refuge System when compatible.

This use is not expected to conflict with any proposed habitat management or reclamation projects on the Refuge provided the Refuge utilizes closures as necessary to protect public safety and to allow habitat management actions such as prescribed burning on the refuge.

Signature:

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2019

Compatibility Determination

Use: WILDLIFE OBSERVATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

“The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Wildlife Observation and Photography are 2 of the 6 legislated wildlife-dependent, priority public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since Cahaba River NWR is a new refuge, the exact number of users is unknown. The level of interest in the local community has been significant since establishment but the number of users can only be approximated at 15,000 annually.

Cahaba River NWR was established on September 25, 2002. Wildlife Observation and Photography have not been allowed on the Refuge since establishment.

Where would the use be conducted?

Wildlife Observation and Photography could occur throughout the Refuge area acquired to date. As additional areas are acquired, they will be evaluated to determine their suitability for this activity.

Access to many areas is limited due to ongoing acquisition. Currently, only one River Road connects directly to a public road. All other areas of the Refuge are accessed via gated private roads. Due to ongoing problems with dumping, littering, and graffiti in the area it is unlikely that these gated private roads will be opened for public access. As we complete Refuge acquisition, additional access may be provided.

When would the use be conducted?

Wildlife Observation and Photography would occur year-round during posted Refuge hours.

How would the use be conducted?

Wildlife Observation and Photography would be subject to any applicable federal and Refuge-specific regulations and occur within designated public use areas on the Refuge.

Why is this use being proposed?

Wildlife Observation and Photography are proposed to offer the public recreation opportunities that are identified as the priority wildlife dependent public uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$7,000 of staff time and \$9,000 of other operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

None

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Monitoring of Activities - \$3,000

Trash Removal - \$500

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$3,500

Maintenance Costs

Road Repair/Grading - \$2,000

Gravel - \$5,000

Signs - \$1,000

Mowing - \$1,000

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to Wildlife Observation and Photography is estimated at \$700 initially and \$250 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues:

None

What efforts have been made to secure adequate resources to support this priority public use?

The Refuge is currently unstaffed and unfunded. Funding for specific needs and projects are currently being sought through the NWRS Refuge Operations and Needs System (RONS) and Maintenance Management System (MMS) programs. In FY 2004, funding for the Central Alabama National Wildlife Refuge Complex Project Leader position was funded through the Cahaba River NWR RONS project. This position is located at Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge in Anniston, Alabama.

Some funding has been provided by the Bibb County Commission in support of the Refuge, and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants as an interim funding measure to support public use projects. A federal matching grant was obtained by the Refuge in 2004 to facilitate improvements to the Cahaba River access point on the River Road using Bibb County Commission funds as a match.

Additional funding to support habitat restoration and studies has been pledged by The Nature Conservancy of Alabama and these funds are being used to solicit matching grants to fund restoration activities. In 2004, funds were obtained using TNC matching funds that will allow restoration of approximately 900 acres of longleaf pine on previously clearcut sites.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are all minor and include damage to vegetation, littering, increased Refuge maintenance response to activities, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts to wildlife or habitats are anticipated.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the Refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No comments were received during the comment period regarding Wildlife Observation and Photography.

NEPA Compliance:What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge,
October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7
Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Photography (wildlife)

Use is compatible with the following
stipulations.

Wildlife Observation

Use is compatible with the following
stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety. Activity may occur during Refuge hours only.

Justification:

Allowing wildlife observation and photography on the Refuge would be consistent with established Refuge goals.

Wildlife observation and photography are 2 of the 6 wildlife-dependent public uses that are to be supported within units of the National Wildlife Refuge System when compatible.

These uses are not expected to conflict with any proposed habitat management or reclamation projects on the Refuge provided the Refuge utilizes closures as necessary to protect public safety and to allow habitat management actions such as prescribed burning on the Refuge.

Signature:

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2019

Compatibility Determination

Use: CANOEING

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant

resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Canoeing for pleasure is not 1 of the 6 legislated uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Since Cahaba River NWR is a new Refuge, the exact number of users is unknown. The level of interest in the central Alabama area is significant, but the number of users can only be approximated at 5,000 annually.

Cahaba River NWR was established on September 25, 2002. Canoeing occurs on the portion of the Cahaba River within the Refuge, but canoeing has not been evaluated and determined to be compatible on the Refuge since establishment.

Where would the use be conducted?

Access to many areas is limited due to ongoing acquisition. Currently, only River Road is available to access the Cahaba River. As we complete Refuge acquisition, additional access may be provided.

When would the use be conducted?

Canoeing could occur year-round. Canoeing is more likely to occur from April to October due to weather conditions.

How would the use be conducted?

It is anticipated that canoeing would be self-guided utilizing Refuge maps, brochures, and kiosks.

Why is this use being proposed?

Canoeing is a popular recreational activity that would allow users to visit and see the Refuge. The Cahaba River is currently being utilized for recreational canoeing. The Refuge represents the only public launching area within a 30 mile stretch of the river.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$3,000 of staff time and \$6,000 of other operations and maintenance funding will be needed to administer this use.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

The River Road leading to the Cahaba River on the Refuge needs several improvements.

1. The launch and fishing area needs to be paved or other hard surface installed to provide parking and launching areas and to prevent sedimentation into the river from ongoing erosion.
2. The intersection with County Road 24 needs to be redesigned to eliminate the steep incline and poor visibility.
3. River Road is too narrow for 2-way traffic through most of its length. An alternate route needs to be developed that would allow anglers and other river users to reach the lower reaches of the Cahaba River within the Refuge.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Monitoring or Guiding of Activities - \$500

Trash Removal - \$500

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$2,000

Maintenance Costs

Road/Trail Repair/Grading - \$1,000

Gravel - \$4,000

Signs - \$500

Mowing - \$500

Monitoring costs:

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to canoeing is estimated at \$250 initially and \$100 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues:

None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are all minor and include damage to vegetation, littering, increased Refuge maintenance, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

No long-term impacts are expected on wildlife or habitat.

Cumulative:

No cumulative impacts are anticipated with this use as proposed.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the Refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No comments were received during the comment period regarding Canoeing.

NEPA Compliance:

What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7 Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Canoeing

Use is compatible with the following stipulations.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Periodic closures of portions of the Refuge may be implemented to conduct habitat management activities, environmental remediation, or to protect public safety. Activity may occur during Refuge hours only. Overnight camping will not be allowed.

Justification:

As proposed, canoeing would support legislated wildlife-dependent public uses.

Signature:

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2014

Compatibility Determination

Use: CAMPING

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

"The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant

resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Overnight camping for pleasure is not authorized on the Refuge and is not one of the 6 priority public wildlife dependent uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Camping occurred on a portion of the Refuge prior to establishment and has occurred since Refuge establishment due to lack of enforcement and public education.

Where would the use be conducted?

If camping is allowed to continue, a designated site away from the riverbank would need to be designated and developed to support the activity.

When would the use be conducted?

Camping is more likely to occur from April to October due to weather conditions.

How would the use be conducted?

If camping were to continue, it would need to be supported by a registration system with limits on the duration of time any person could occupy a designated site.

Camping facilities would need to be developed to provide restroom facilities for campers to prevent waste from entering the Cahaba River.

Individual camp sites would need to be delineated to prevent damage to surrounding vegetation.

Camp sites would need to be relocated away from the banks of the Cahaba River to prevent the present riverbank erosion problem.

Why is this use being proposed?

Camping has occurred within the boundaries of the Refuge without authorization. There is no other publicly accessible land in the area to utilize for this activity.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Central Alabama Refuge Complex Project Leader stationed at Mountain Longleaf NWR is the only staff person and is not located on site. It is estimated that \$250,000 would be needed for initial startup and \$96,000 annually thereafter including \$50,000 of staff resources. A portion of this cost could be offset by fees charged to users but camping is never likely to be self-supporting.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

Special parking area would be needed to allow parking of vehicles.

Trails would need to be developed that avoided steep slopes and impacts to the river.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$50,000

Maintenance Costs

Estimated one-time cost for campsite design and facilities - \$250,000

Road/Trail Repair/Grading - \$10,000

Gravel - \$20,000

Signs - \$2,000

Mowing - \$4,000

Parking Areas - \$7,000

Trash Pick-up - \$3,000

Monitoring costs:

Any camping would need to be extensively monitored. Campers would need to be monitored to ensure that they are limiting their stay to the time allowed. Facilities and campgrounds need to be monitored to ensure that they are at an acceptable cleanliness and safety level. This monitoring would be partially included within the staff resources identified above but additional monitoring would be needed by a full-time campground overseer. This could be met through the use of a volunteer to stay at the campground or as a separately funded temporary position.

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to camping is estimated at \$500 initially and \$200 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues:

A user fee could be established to support this use. The actual revenue would be dependent on the number and type of camping areas. It is estimated that camping would likely lead to revenues of \$30,000 - \$75,000 annually.

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are damage to vegetation due to trampling, erosion, littering, increased Refuge maintenance, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

Long-term impacts to wildlife are expected to include loss of habitat due to campground development and associated infrastructure improvements. The increase in maintenance required to support this use would detract from normal maintenance and maintenance conducted in support of legislated wildlife dependent priority public uses.

Cumulative:

Each use added in addition to priority public uses will result in an increase in traffic and needed infrastructure. Camping will lead to cumulative impacts to habitat, maintenance costs and infrastructure needs.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No comments were received during the comment period regarding Camping.

Three written comments were received on this use following the public meeting held in West Blocton on March 18, 2004. One of these commenters asked that we restrict camping until we are better able to control it. The remaining two commenters suggested we eliminate camping.

Our response was:

Due to the visible impacts to habitats adjacent to the Cahaba River and because of staffing and funding restraints, camping has been determined to not be compatible on the Refuge.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

NEPA Compliance:What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge,
October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7
Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Camping

Use is not compatible.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Not Applicable

Justification:

Camping would necessitate additional parking, infrastructure, and maintenance beyond what the Refuge's current budget can support or staff oversee.

Camping would lead to the direct loss of habitat due to infrastructure improvements, erosion and trampling.

Signature:

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2014

Compatibility Determination

Use: OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Refuge Name: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

County: Bibb, Alabama

Establishing and Acquisition Authorities:

The Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act, P.L. No. 106-331

Fish and Wildlife Act 1956

Refuge Purposes:

Establishment purpose: "In administering the Refuge, the Secretary shall— (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River (including associated fish, wildlife, and plant species); (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.); (3) in providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife- oriented recreation, ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the Refuge, in accordance with section 4(a)(3) and (4) of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 668ee(a)(3), (4)); and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-Federal entities to promote public awareness of the resources of the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System and public participation in the conservation of those resources." V114 STAT. 1304-1305, dated OCT. 19, 2000.

Additional purposes: "... for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(a)(4) "... for the benefit of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in performing its activities and services. Such acceptance may be subject to the terms of any restrictive or affirmative covenant, or condition of servitude ..." 16 U.S.C. § 742f(b)(1) (Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956)

National Wildlife Refuge System Mission:

“The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

Description of Use:

What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

Off-road vehicle use for pleasure is not authorized on the Refuge and is not one of the 6 priority public wildlife dependent uses of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Off-road vehicle use is occurring within areas of the Refuge currently.

Where would the use be conducted?

Should off-road vehicle use be authorized, it would likely occur on designated Refuge roads, firebreaks and trails.

When would the use be conducted?

If off-road vehicle use is permitted, it could occur year round during refuge hours.

How would the use be conducted?

If authorized, off-road vehicle use would be self-guided utilizing refuge-provided maps, brochures, and kiosks.

Why is this use being proposed?

Off-road vehicle users have contacted the refuge concerning the possibility of utilizing the area.

Availability of Resources:

Resources involved in the administration and management of the use:

Approximately \$25,000 of staff time, \$112,500 of initial startup funding and \$37,500 of annual maintenance funds would be needed to support this use.

Cahaba River NWR currently is unstaffed. The Refuge has no law enforcement or administrative staff on-site and will rely on Wheeler NWR's law enforcement and administrative staffs to meet these obligations. Cahaba River NWR currently has no maintenance staff but will use outside contracts and Wheeler NWR maintenance staff to meet the increase in maintenance needs. Cahaba River NWR is currently complexed with Wheeler NWR to meet essential needs.

Special equipment, facilities, or improvements necessary to support the use:

Special parking area would be needed to allow parking of vehicles.

Trails would need to be developed that avoided steep slopes and impacts to the river.

Additional access would need to be provided.

Maintenance costs:

Staff Time

Staff Time for Maintenance Activities Described Below - \$25,000

Maintenance Costs

Estimated one-time cost for trail design and configuration - \$112,500

Road/Trail Repair/Grading - \$10,000

Gravel - \$20,000

Signs - \$1,000

Mowing - \$1,000

Parking Areas - \$5,000

Trash Removal - \$500

Monitoring costs:

If off-road vehicle use continues on any roads, trails or firebreaks on the refuge, it would be necessary to implement an extensive monitoring system for the areas open for this use. Due to the steep terrain that refuge roads/trails/firebreaks traverse and the soil types found on the refuge, extensive erosion is probable. Monitoring costs would be approximately \$5,000 annually.

The Refuge may utilize automatic traffic counters to track the number of vehicles for all uses combined. Costs for this effort attributable to off-road vehicle use is estimated at \$500

initially and \$200 annually after the first year.

Offsetting revenues:

None

Anticipated Impacts of the Use:

Short-term impacts:

Anticipated impacts from this use are damage to vegetation, erosion, littering, increased refuge maintenance, potential conflicts with other visitors, and disturbance to wildlife.

Long-term impacts:

Long-term impacts to wildlife are expected to include loss of habitat due to erosion and infrastructure improvements and possible loss of habitat. The increase in maintenance required to support this use would detract from normal maintenance and maintenance conducted in support of legislated wildlife dependent priority public uses.

Cumulative:

Each use added in addition to priority public uses will result in an increase in traffic and needed infrastructure. Off-road vehicle use will lead to cumulative impacts to habitat, maintenance costs and infrastructure needs.

Public Review and Comment:

The period of public review and comment began 5/3/2004 and ended 6/2/2004.

The following methods were used to solicit public review and comment:

Newspaper announcement

Public meeting was held at the West Blocton High School on March 18, 2004 during the scoping period for this document.

Media used to solicit public review and comment included Centreville Press, Birmingham News, Tuscaloosa News.

Why was this level of public review and comment selected?

A 30 day review was selected to allow a greater opportunity for public review than is required. The expanded review period was selected primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have additional time to become familiar with the National Wildlife Refuge System mission and regulations.

Summarize comments received and any actions taken or not taken because of comments received.

No comments were received during the comment period regarding Off-Road Vehicles.

Two written comments were received on this use following the public meeting held in West Blocton on March 18, 2004. Both commenters asked that we eliminate this use.

Our response was:

Due to the visible impacts to habitats adjacent to the Cahaba River and because it does not support one of our priority public uses, this use has been determined to not be compatible on the Refuge and will be eliminated.

No changes were made to this compatibility determination as a result of this comment.

NEPA Compliance:

What type of NEPA compliance has been used?

Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact

What are the title and dates of the documents?

Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge,
October 2004

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Public Use Plan Intra-Service Section 7
Biological Evaluation, October 2004

Environmental Action Statement Finding of No Significant Impact, November 2004

Determination:

Off-road vehicles and ATV's

Use is not compatible.

Stipulations Necessary to Ensure Compatibility:

Not Applicable

Justification:

Off-road vehicle use would lead to the direct loss of habitat due to infrastructure improvements and erosion.

Off-road vehicle use would necessitate additional parking, infrastructure, and maintenance beyond what the refuge's current budget can support or staff oversee.

Signature:

Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Regional Compatibility Coordinator: _____
(Signature and Date)

Review:

Refuge Supervisor: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence:

Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10- or 15-Year Re-Evaluation Date: November 2014

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Public Use Plan

Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge

Bibb County, Alabama

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

October 2004

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I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) established the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) in September 2002. Since establishment, public use has continued to occur within the boundaries of the Refuge without the planning needed to ensure that these uses are compatible and appropriate with the purpose of the Refuge. The Service proposes to adopt a Public Use Plan for the Refuge. Proposed uses within the plan have been determined to be appropriate and compatible with the Refuge System and the purpose for which the refuge was established.

The Refuge is located near the small town of West Blocton in Bibb County, Alabama (Figure 1). The Refuge was authorized on October 19, 2000, when the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge Establishment Act (P.L. 106-331) was signed into law. The legislation directed the Secretary of Interior to acquire up to 3,500 acres of lands and waters within the boundaries of the Refuge (Figure 2). The purpose of the Refuge is to preserve and manage a segment of the scenic Cahaba River which is recognized nationally for its unique biological diversity. On September 25, 2002 the Service established the Refuge and acquired initial refuge lands.

This document considers the proposed Public Use Plan and two alternatives to adoption of the proposed plan, and analyzes and compares the impacts that each alternative is likely to have on the human environment.

Refuge lands were formally in corporate and private ownership, and not available as public lands open to hunting. All hunting took place through private hunting leases or the permission of former owners.

Purposes for which the Refuge was established include (1) conserve, enhance, and restore the native aquatic and terrestrial community characteristics of the Cahaba River; (2) conserve, enhance, and restore habitat to maintain and assist in the recovery of animals and plants that are listed as threatened or endangered species; (3) ensure that hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation are the priority general public uses of the refuge when providing opportunities for compatible fish- and wildlife-oriented recreation; and (4) encourage the use of volunteers and to facilitate partnerships among the Service, local communities, conservation organizations, and other non-federal entities when promoting public awareness of the refuge's resources and those of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Analysis of alternatives considered the primary purposes of the Refuge along with environmental and social/cultural consequences related to implementing these programs.

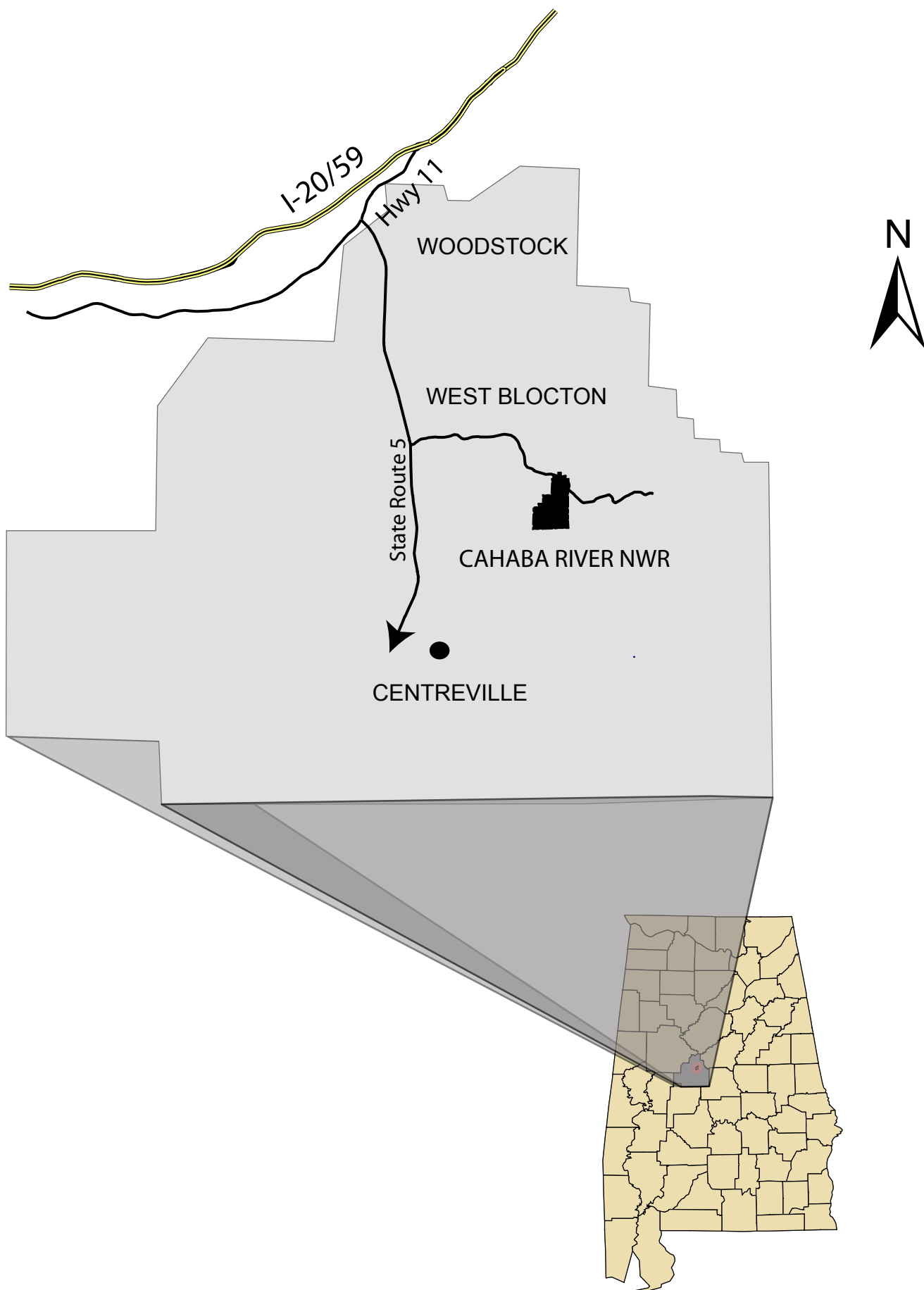


FIG. 1 CAHABA RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE LOCATION

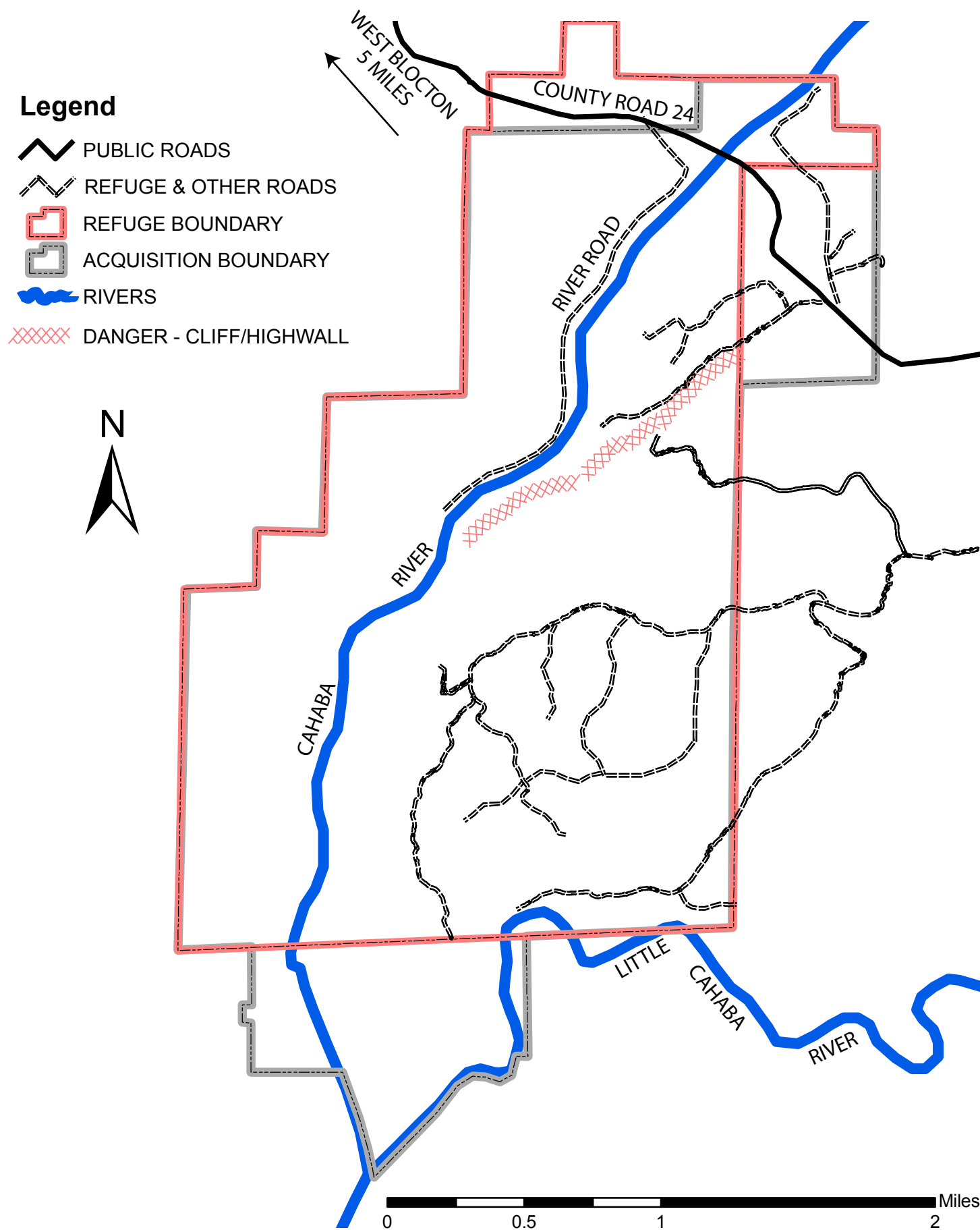


FIG. 2 CAHABA RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Wildlife-dependant recreational uses, including hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, are identified as priority uses in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. These potential uses were reviewed and considered for compatibility during development of the proposed Public Use Plan.

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is “to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans” (National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997). National Wildlife Refuges provide important habitat for native plants and many species of mammals, birds, fish, insects, amphibians, and reptiles. They also play a vital role in preserving endangered and threatened species. Refuges offer a wide variety of wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities and many have visitor centers, wildlife trails, and environmental education programs. Nationwide, about 30 million visitors annually hunt, fish, observe and photograph wildlife, or participate in educational and interpretive activities on refuges.

II. ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

The assessment of possible public use options was evaluated through the following three alternatives.

Alternative 1 (No Action – Continuation of Existing Public Uses)

Alternative 2 (Limited Public Access)

Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative – Implementation of proposed Public Use Plan)

A. Alternative 1: No Action – Continuation of Existing Public Uses

Under this alternative, the Refuge would be open to all public uses that currently occur on the Refuge. The River Road would remain ungated and the public would continue to have day and night access. Remaining roads on refuge would remain gated and locked, but would be selectively reviewed in the future for opening once staff are stationed on the Refuge.

B. Alternative 2: Limited Public Access

Under this alternative, the Refuge would be opened for priority public uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation) and those additional public uses determined to be compatible with Refuge goals (canoeing and bicycling). River Road would be gated and access would

be limited to daylight hours. Remaining roads on refuge would remain gated and locked, but would be selectively reviewed in the future for opening once staff are stationed on the Refuge.

C. Alternative 3: Preferred Alternative – Implementation of proposed Public Use Plan

Under the preferred alternative, the Service will allow priority public uses (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation) and those additional public uses determined to be compatible with Refuge goals (canoeing and bicycling). River Road would remain ungated pending development of alternative routes to access the lower reaches of the river within Refuge boundaries. Public use along River Road would be regulated through law enforcement, information brochures and signage. Remaining roads on refuge would remain gated and locked, but would be selectively reviewed in the future for opening once staff are stationed on the Refuge.

Alternative 3 (Implementation of proposed Public Use Plan) was selected as the preferred alternative. Both legislation and comments received at the public meeting (March 18, 2004) supported a plan that also protected the significant natural resources of the area. This option provided maximum public use and access to the Refuge, while also protecting sensitive ecological features.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This section describes the environment that is affected by the alternatives.

A. General

The Refuge is located in Bibb County, Alabama. The City of Birmingham is 25 miles to the northeast, Tuscaloosa is 25 miles northwest, Montgomery is 70 miles southeast, and West Blocton is 5 miles west (Figure 1). The Refuge is primarily composed of the following three natural community types: pine forest; hardwood forests in ravines, north slopes and bottomlands; and aquatic ecosystems (Figure 2).

B. Pine Forest

Historically, 75 to 80 percent of uplands within the Refuge are believed to have been forested by mountain longleaf pine forests, a distinct landscape occurring on steep to moderate slopes. In pre-settlement times, these mountain longleaf pine forests

composed about 18 percent of longleaf pine landscape in the southeastern United States. Today, there is believed to be less than 200,000 acres of this unique ecosystem remaining with most of the larger stands occurring on public lands within the Talladega National Forest and the Mountain Longleaf Pine National Wildlife Refuge. Longleaf Pine occasionally forms pure stands, most commonly on southern and western slopes. It is commonly found mixed with Virginia, shortleaf and loblolly pine and various hardwoods. Blackjack oak is common and white, red, post, and rock chestnut oaks are typical associates. The ground cover, particularly when burning is infrequent, is made up of low-growing blueberries and huckleberries with many perennial herbaceous plants. Areas burned more frequently can have a diverse herbaceous cover composed of various bluestems, Indian grass and other herbaceous plants.

Within the Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, most uplands that historically contained this habitat type have been converted to loblolly pine plantations. However, there are existing fire suppressed stands of this habitat type scattered throughout the Refuge. The largest concentration of this forest type is located in the Refuge's interior.

C. *Hardwood Forests*

Hardwood forests comprise about 30 percent of the Refuge with an additional 15-20 percent in mixed hardwoods/pine that historically may have been predominately pine. Small streams, both spring fed and perennial, occur throughout the Refuge and form hardwood forested ravines that bisect upland pinelands. Areas along streams are typically forested by species such as red maple, sweetgum, sycamore, tulip poplar and water oak. Upland hardwoods adjacent to the streams and on steep or north facing slopes typically have a strong component of white oak, beech, hickories, black gum and post oak.

Undoubtedly, the hardwood component on the Refuge has increased due to past land management practices, including clear-cutting and fire exclusion. The historical extent of hardwoods on the refuge is not exactly clear. It is suspected that there was always a strong component of hardwoods along the streams and on steep north facing slopes. Pines and mixed pine/hardwood forests however probably had a stronger component of pine in historic times. Larger blocks of pines and mixed hardwoods exist on the western side of the refuge.

D. *Aquatic Ecosystems*

The Cahaba River provides important habitat for a diverse assemblage of plants and animals and is sought out by canoeists, fisherman and others for its scenic quality. The Cahaba supplies a large portion of Birmingham's drinking water supply, and also receives domestic and industrial wastewaters.

The Refuge contains significant aquatic resources including 3 miles of the Cahaba River as well as several tributary streams that include the Little Cahaba River, Caffee Creek, Pratt Creek, and Little Ugly Creek. The Refuge lies near the midpoint of the Cahaba, approximately 95 river miles from both its headwaters and from its confluence with the Alabama River near Selma. The watershed area upstream of the Refuge is approximately 650 sq miles. Within the Refuge, the Cahaba River ranges from 125 to 250 feet wide with water depth from a few inches in the shoals to nearly 10 feet in pools. Several small islands are scattered along the course, but the dominate channel features are the flat bedrock shoals. Hargrove shoal itself is nearly a mile long.

Attractive and boulder-strewn Caffee Creek is the largest tributary stream flowing through the Refuge from the west and averages 25 feet wide and less than a foot in depth.

The southeastern edge of the Refuge contains a short stretch of shoreline along the Little Cahaba River. The Little Cahaba River drains nearly 265 square miles, and is 50 to 75 feet wide and a few feet deep along the Refuge boundary. The Little Cahaba River flows through the Cahaba Valley district of the Valley and Ridge province whose bedrock is comprised early Paleozoic limestone and dolomite.

The biological richness and significance of the Cahaba River cannot be overstated. Historically, 131 species of fish, 43 species of freshwater mussels, 20 snail species, 24 crayfish species and 146 caddisfly species have been recorded. Aquatic biota are not only diverse, but nationally and globally significant.

E. Endangered Species

Eighteen species listed as federally endangered, threatened or as candidate species are known or suspected to inhabit the Refuge or adjacent river (Table 1). Ten listed mussels, snails and fish are found within the Cahaba and/or Little Cahaba Rivers. Three listed plants are known from the Refuge, with two restricted to limestone glades. Only the Georgia aster is found in upland situations. Three mammals are also known or suspected within the area. The gray bat probably forages along the river corridors, but is not know to roost in the vicinity. The Indiana bat could possibly inhabit the area, but no records are known. Bald eagles have been sited in the area, but are not known to nest. They probably use the river system for feeding.

F. Fishery, Hunting and Canoeing

The Cahaba River and tributaries provide an established recreational fishing and canoeing resource in the region. Canoeing, particularly for viewing the Cahaba lilies and general scenic appreciation, attracts visitors from distant locations. Historically, hunting has been allowed through the permission of local landowners. In some situations this may have occurred through private hunting leases.

Table 1

**Endangered, Threatened and Candidate Species
Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge**

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status*
<i>Leptoxis ampla</i>	Round Rocksnail	E
<i>Lepyrium showalteri</i>	Flat Pebblesnail	E
<i>Lioplax cyclostomaformis</i>	Cylindrical lioplax	E
<i>Lampsilis altilis</i>	Fine-lined Pocketbook	T
<i>Lampsilis perovalis</i>	Orange-nacre mucket	E
<i>Pleurobema decisum</i>	Southern Clubshell	E
<i>Ptychobranhus greeni</i>	Triangular Kidneyshell	E
<i>Notropis cahabae</i>	Cahaba Shiner	E
<i>Percina aurolineata</i>	Goldline Darter	T
<i>Cyprinella caerulea</i>	Blue Shiner	T
<i>Arabis georgiana</i>	Georgia Rock-cress	C
<i>Aster georgianus</i>	Georgia Aster	C
<i>Marshallia mohrii</i>	Mohr's Barbara's Buttons	T
<i>Spigelia gentianoides</i> var. <i>alabamensis</i>	Alabama Gentian Pinkroot	E
<i>Xyris tennesseensis</i>	Tennessee Yellow-eyed Grass	E
<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Bald Eagle	T
<i>Myotis grisecens</i>	Gray Bat	E
<i>Myotis sodalist</i>	Indiana Bat	E

* E – Endangered, T – Threatened, C – Candidate

G. Cultural Resources

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and Section 14 of the Archeological Resources Protection Act require the Service to evaluate the effects of any of its actions on cultural resources (historic, architectural and archeological) that are listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Although cultural resource surveys have not been accomplished on the Refuge, both archaeological and historical sites are suspected to exist. Areas bordering the Cahaba River and tributaries would have provided habitable lands for aboriginal inhabitants. During historic period, portions of the site were important in the early coal and timber industry. The historic coal mining community of Piper formally existed just north of the Refuge. The Fish and Wildlife Service Cultural Resource Office (Kanaski, personal communications) has reviewed information on historic properties and past investigations on or near the Refuge, and determined that the proposed action will have “no effect”.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section analyzes and discusses the potential impacts of the three alternatives described in Section II.

Continuation of Existing Public Uses (Alternative 1) would allow existing public uses on the Refuge to continue. Over the years, an informal and unplanned infrastructure (River Road) has become established to support recreation and visitation activities on what is now Refuge lands. River Road is a poorly designed dirt road located directly on the river's edge. In addition, lack of sanitation facilities contributes to adverse effects on aquatic and riverine ecological communities. Erosion, sedimentation, debris, and wastes place environmental stress on the natural and ecological landscape. Without a methodical evaluation of uses and the implementation of infrastructure improvements to support these activities, the natural environment will be continually degraded. With formation of the Refuge, increased visitation can only be expected to accelerate these potential impacts.

Limited Public Access (Alternative 2) would prohibit all public activities except those determined to be compatible with Refuge goals. With gating of River Road, visitation during nighttime periods would be eliminated. This would prevent camping and other unauthorized activities from sunset to sunrise. While this alternative was considered environmentally preferable, it limits the duration of public use on the Refuge.

Implementing the Proposed Public Use Plan (Alternative 3) was considered the preferred public use alternative. Alternative 1 (Continuation of Existing Public Uses) would continue adversely impacting the ecological integrity of the river, and with increased visitation, would probably increase the level of impacts. Limited Public Use (Alternative 2) would reduce impact levels, but would also reduce visitor access along the river. Implementation of the Public Use Plan (Alternative 3 – Preferred Alternative) proposes public uses determined to be compatible with Refuge goals while allowing more opportunities for use on the Refuge. The use of signage, information brochures and law enforcement were considered appropriate to control unauthorized public uses, while increasing compatible uses. The success of these control measures will be carefully monitored during the initial period of Refuge operation. Should monitoring demonstrate that unacceptable impacts are continuing, Alternative 2 will be implemented and a gate will be constructed at the entrance of River Road.

Regardless of alternative, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act will be complied with before any public use improvements are constructed. An inadvertent site discovery plan will be developed and implemented for all proposed improvements,

V. INFORMATION ON PREPARERS

This document was prepared by:

Steve Miller, USFWS, Refuge Manager, Cahaba River NWR, Bibb County, Alabama

Bill Garland, USFWS, Biologist, Mountain Longleaf NWR, Anniston, Alabama

VI. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COMMENT PERIOD

A public scoping meeting was held in West Blocton, Bibb County, Alabama, on March 18, 2004 prior to the development of the Public Use Plan, Compatibility Determinations and Environmental Assessment. A presentation was given on the purpose, proposed timeline, and likely issues/concerns associated with the drafts of these documents. Sheets were provided for attendees to fill out anonymous comments for consideration in the documents. Twenty-nine people attended the meeting and seven provided written comments at the end of the meeting.

The drafts of the Public Use Plan, Compatibility Determinations and Environmental Assessment were released for a 30-day public comment period on May 3, 2004. A 30-day public comment period was chosen primarily because the refuge is new to the community and we wanted the public to have ample time to comment on the proposed uses. The comment period ended June 2, 2004. No comments were received during this public comment period.

VII. SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

As previously described, the Service proposes to implement a program for public use on the Refuge. Details of these programs are provided in the proposed "Public Use Plan". An analysis of three alternatives related to public use included:

Alternative 1: No Action – Continuation of Existing Public Uses

Alternative 2: Limited Public Access

Alternative 3: Preferred Alternative - Implementation of Public Use Plan

An analysis of potential environmental and cultural resource impacts from the three alternatives concluded that Alternative 1 (No Action – Continuation of Existing Public Uses) could degrade the natural environment and potentially result in serious impacts to Refuge natural environments. No significant adverse impacts are anticipated under Alternative 2 (Limited Public Access) or Alternative 3 (Preferred Alternative – Implementation of Public Use Plan). Legislation and Refuge compatibility determinations however support the Preferred Alternative. The Preferred Alternative represents the greatest degree of public use that can currently be provided on the Refuge without potentially degrading natural ecosystems. Should monitoring of Alternative 3 demonstrate that unacceptable impacts are continuing, Alternative 2 will be implemented and a gate will be constructed on River Road restricting nighttime access.

UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT

Within the spirit and intent of the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other statutes, orders, and policies that protect fish and wildlife resources, I have established the following administrative record and determined that the action of allowing public use to occur on Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge, Bibb County, Alabama in accordance with the Public Use Plan and Compatibility Determinations:

Check One:

- ☐ is a categorical exclusion as provided by 516 DM 2, Appendix 1 and 516 DM 6, Appendix 1 section. No further NEPA documentation will therefore be made.
- ☒ is found not to have significant environmental effects as determined by the attached environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact.
- ☐ is found to have significant effects and, therefore, further consideration of this action will require a notice of intent to be published in the Federal Register announcing the decision to prepare an EIS.
- ☐ is not approved because of unacceptable environmental damage, or violation of Fish and Wildlife Service mandates, policy, regulations, or procedures.
- ☐ is an emergency action within the context of 40 CFR 1 506.1 1. Only those actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency will be taken. Other related actions remain subject to NEPA review.

Other supporting documents: Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation

Signature Approval:

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
(1) Originator	Date	(2) Regional Environmental Coordinator	Date
 <input type="text"/>	 <input type="text"/>	 <input type="text"/>	 <input type="text"/>
(3) Assistant Regional Director	Date	(4) Regional Director	Date

Facility: Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge
Title: Environmental Assessment Public Use Plan for Cahaba River
National Wildlife Refuge

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

For the reasons briefly presented below and based on an evaluation of the information contained in the supporting references enumerated below, I have determined that public use and hunting activities described as the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 3) in the attached Environmental Assessment (sub-section II.C) at Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge is not a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. An Environmental Impact Statement will, accordingly, not be prepared.

Reasons:

1. Providing the general public with a quality wildlife oriented recreational experience, through hunting and other wildlife oriented activities will have no detrimental affects to Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge or the environment.
2. There are no anticipated adverse impacts to threatened and endangered species or other wildlife populations on the Refuge.
3. The preferred alternative represents the greatest opportunity for safe public use of the Refuge.

Supporting References:

1. Environmental Assessment
2. Section 7 Consultation
3. Cultural Resource Review
4. Compatibility Determination

Concur: _____
Regional NEPA Coordinator

Date: _____

Regional Director, FWS, Region 4

Date: _____

Distribution:
Wash., DC (OEC)
State Clearinghouse